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**Mothers' Emotional Attachment to the Ex-Spouse: The Impact on Mothers'
Depression and Parenting Practices, Co-Parenting Difficulties, and Children's
Behavior Problems**

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Jacqueline Suzanne DeAnda

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Rebecca and Steve, who have been constant reminders of the love, admiration, and respect that can exist when co-parenting apart. You continue to inspire and amaze me each and every day. I would also like to dedicate this work to my beloved sisters, Alexandria and Francesca, who continue to encourage and stand by me through every life hardship. I am eternally grateful to have two unwavering support systems and best friends in you. Lastly, this work is dedicated to my greatest role model, my late grandfather, Al. Thank you for instilling your love of science in me and encouraging me to be my best and brightest self. I love and miss you always.

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Abstract

Mothers' Emotional Attachment to the Ex-Spouse: The Impact on Mothers' Depression and Parenting Practices, Co-Parenting Difficulties, and Children's Behavior Problems

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Compared to non-parents, divorced parents must remain in each other's lives to facilitate childrearing. Research has shown that conflict is markedly higher for divorced parents than nonparents, which lasts even ten years following divorce. This difference is, perhaps, related to challenges in differentiating current co-parental roles from their previous roles as romantic partners. This task is particularly difficult for those who experience continued longing for their ex-spouses and ongoing rumination over the dissolution of the marriage, a term we refer to as, "emotional attachment." The primary aims of this study are to examine the consequences of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on children's behavior problems, as well as investigate mediational models by which the association occurs. I hypothesized that mothers' lingering attachment will be associated with increased depressive symptoms, disruptions in parenting practices, and

co-parenting difficulties, consequently leading to more problematic behaviors in children. The current study used longitudinal, multi-method and multi-informant data of mothers ($N = 319$) and children ($N = 319$) following divorce. Using hierarchical linear modeling techniques, results indicated that emotional attachment was significantly associated with increased problem behaviors in children. In addition, mothers' depressive symptoms mediated the link between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's internalizing and total behavior problems, but did not children's externalizing behavior problems. Future research is needed to uncover the ways in which mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse influences children's externalizing behavior problems. Further implications of mothers' emotional attachment for children's behavior are discussed.

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Introduction

One of the most significant challenges facing divorcing parents is navigating the co-parenting relationship when the spousal relationship ends (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006; Ahrons, 1981; Berman, 1985; Cole & Cole, 1999; Price, Serovich, Chapman, & Wright, 1992). In the first two and a half years following divorce, contact between ex-spouses *with* children is less friendly and more conflictual than between ex-spouses *without* children (Masheter, 1991). Although conflict markedly decreases over time, parents, compared to nonparents, tend to have more antagonistic conflict even ten years after divorce (Fischer, De Graaf, & Kalmijn, 2005). Divorcing parents must therefore differentiate their current roles as strictly co-parents from their previous roles as romantic partners (Madden-Derdich & Arditti, 1999; Price et al., 1992). This task can be especially difficult for those who experience continued longing for their ex-spouses and ongoing rumination over the dissolution of the marriage (Kitson, 1982). This sort of “emotional attachment” has been suggested as a possible contributing factor to the experience of parents’ negative emotion and depression (Kitson, 1982; Marchand, Schedler, & Wagstaff, 2004; Weiss, 1976), disruptions in parenting practices (Kitson, 1982), as well as continuing relationship and co-parenting challenges with the former partner (Dozier, Sollie, Stack, & Smith, 1993; Price et al., 1992), all of which have been identified as playing a critical role in children’s post-divorce adjustment (Lansford, 2009). Thus, understanding how emotional attachment relates to (a) increased parental depression, (b)

diminished parenting practices, and (c) co-parenting difficulties such as conflict between former spouses can also contribute to the study of children's adjustment following divorce.

Previous research on parents' emotional attachment, although informative, has been limited. Kitson (1982), for example, concluded that emotional attachment to the ex-spouse was a cause, rather than a consequence, of adults' depressive symptoms; however, this conclusion, was based on cross-sectional analyses. With regard to parenting, Kitson (1982) found that individuals with high emotional attachment reported parenting as a significant challenge compared with those low on attachment, but relied on single-informant data. Moreover, Madden-Derdich & Arditto (1999) reported that attachment to the former spouse was related to the quality of the co-parenting relationship, yet their data was also cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. Finally, there is theoretical reason to believe that there may be a direct relation between parents' emotional attachment and children's problem behavior. In accord with Bandura's (1992) social cognitive theory of social referencing, children are guided by and model their parents' behaviors during times of uncertainty. If parents experience emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and express negative emotions as a result of the divorce, children may model similar behaviors during the adjustment process.

The primary aims of this study are therefore to examine the consequences of mothers’¹ emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on (a) mothers’ depression, (b) mothers’ parenting practices, (c) co-parenting difficulties, and (d) children problem behaviors. Because previous research has consistently linked the mothers’ depression, diminished parenting practices, and low-quality co-parenting relationships to children’s problem behaviors (e.g., Amato, 2010; Lansford, 2009), a secondary aim is to test the viability of a mediational model of mothers’ emotional attachment to the ex-spouse, mothers’ depression, disruptions in mothers’ parenting practices, co-parenting difficulties, and children’s problem behaviors.

CHANGES IN EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT TO THE EX-SPOUSE OVER TIME

Kitson (1982) has defined emotional attachment as including “denial, disbelief, pining, or preoccupation with the former spouse, guilt, anger, loss of normal patterns of conduct, and apathy” (Kitson, 1982, p. 383). Because humans’ needs for attachment and belongingness is strong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), it is common for separating individuals to experience anger with their (ex-) spouses while simultaneously wanting to rejoin them (Weiss, 1976). Thus, divorcing partners often suffer the loss of their relationships, even if those relationships are no longer rewarding (Kitson, 1982). In fact, research has found that most divorcing individuals experience feelings of emotional attachment toward their ex-spouses (Berman, 1985; Kitson, 1982; Spanier & Casto, 1979;

¹ Research notes that mothers retain primary residential custody of their children nearly 75% of the time, and thus, I include only residential mothers in this sample. This is not to discount fathers’ involvement or the impact they have on their children’s development.

Weiss, 1976). Kitson (1982) found that 86% of divorced men and women experience some emotional attachment to their ex-spouses. Others found that 70% exhibit mild to strong emotional attachment to their ex-spouses, while only 30% did not (Spanier & Casto, 1979). More recent studies have shown that while most divorced individuals recover from the divorce within a few years (Hetherington & Kelly, 2003), approximately 20% of the divorced population have significant difficulty completing the psychological divorce (Mancini, Bonanno, & Clark, 2011)

The amount and duration of emotional attachment individuals experience have been consistently related to demographic and relational factors. First, demographic factors such as number of children, number of male children, and low socioeconomic status, have been significantly associated with greater emotional attachment to the ex-spouse (Berman, 1985). Between-couple relationship factors, such as having an ex-spouse who initiated the divorce (Kitson, 1982; Madden-Derdich & Arditto, 1999), or has repartnered (Kitson, 1982), have both been shown to increase emotional attachment to the ex-spouse, while longer separations from marriage have shown to decrease it. Research on the relation between length of marriage and emotional attachment has yielded inconsistent findings (e.g., Brown, Felton, Whiteman, & Manela, 1980; Madden-Derdich & Arditto, 1999).

In terms of (ex-) spousal relationship quality, more extreme emotions tend to predict emotional attachment to the ex-spouse. For instance, greater pre-separation feelings of romantic love and affection have been significantly associated with

heightened emotional attachment, while pre-separation desire for divorce have been significantly negatively associated with emotional attachment (Berman, 1985; Brown et al., 1980; Kitson, 1982). Following separation, depression and longing (Berman, 1985; Kitson, 1982), as well as low-quality post-divorce contact with the ex-spouse (Berman, 1985) have been shown to increase emotional attachment. Lastly, although the study was a non-marital sample, Sbarra (2006) found that increased love, anger, and preoccupation over the former partner were negatively associated with sadness recovery, while ongoing sadness was negatively associated with anger recovery. These findings indicate that having an inability to emotionally detach from the former partner inhibits the recovery process and promotes emotional attachment following relationship termination.

Divorcing parents are at greater risk for experiencing emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and adjustment difficulties than non-parents. Previous research has shown that the number of children—and specifically the presence of male children—is a significant predictor of increased emotional attachment to the ex-spouse (Berman, 1985). Further, parents who experience emotional attachment to the ex-spouse are significantly more likely to report adjustment difficulties following divorce (Kitson, 1982). Divorcing parents with high levels of emotional attachment reported single parenthood as one of their most difficult adjustments following divorce (Kitson, 1982). Previous findings have highlighted a positive relation between co-parental support and emotional attachment to the ex-spouse, demonstrating that more difficult emotional attachment to the ex-spouse may come as a result of shared parenting (Madden-Derdich & Arditti, 1999), particularly

when there are relational boundary ambiguities (Price et al., 1992). These findings highlight that parenthood, both single and shared, may increase divorced individuals' likelihood for experiencing emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and adjustment difficulties following divorce.

FACTORS AFFECTING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS FOLLOWING DIVORCE

Children from divorced, compared to non-divorced, families have shown poorer adjustment on a variety of outcomes, including behavior problems both within and outside of the home (Amato, 2010; Di Stefano & Cyr, 2014; Lansford, 2009). Many of these differences can be explained by parental adjustment and well-being both prior to and following divorce (Lansford, 2009). For example, research has shown children's behavior problems following divorce to be associated with (custodial) parents' depression (Di Stefano & Cyr, 2014; Marchand et al., 2004; Stallman & Ohan, 2016; Weaver & Schofield, 2015), disruptions in parenting (Di Stefano & Cyr, 2014; Pickar, 2003; Stallman & Ohan, 2016; Tichovolsky, Arnold, & Baker, 2013) and co-parenting difficulties, such as conflict and poor communication (Amato, 2000; Amato & Afifi, 2006; Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Marchand et al., 2004). Thus, knowledge of how these factors may be influenced by emotional attachment can enhance our understanding of children's post-divorce adjustment. It is possible that any relations between emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's adjustment are mediated by parenting factors, such as mothers' depression, disruptions in parenting practices, as well as co-parenting difficulties.

Mothers' depression.

Divorce often produces emotional distress, such as depression (Lansford, 2009), regardless of the quality of marriage or desires for divorce prior to the divorce itself (Weiss, 1976). In fact, one study showed that up to 22% of divorced individuals (compared to less than 10% of non-divorced individuals) suffered from Major Depressive Disorder following separation (Sbarra, Emery, Beam, & Ocker, 2014). The distress experienced during and following divorce has been compared to when children lose attachment figures (Kitson, 1982; Weiss, 1976). Others have gone as far as to compare the distress experienced during divorce to spousal bereavement (Brodbeck, Berger, & Znoj, 2017; Kitson, 1982; Mancini et al., 2011; Waller, 1967). Thus, it is understandable that individuals who continue to have an emotional attachment to their ex-spouses are at greater risk of experiencing depressive symptoms.

Scholars have consistently found emotional attachment to the ex-spouse (or characteristics that may be associated with experiencing emotional attachment to the ex-spouse) linked to depressive symptoms. For example, Kitson (1982) noted emotional attachment to the ex-spouse as a primary cause of depressive symptoms for divorced individuals, though depressive symptoms can also predict feelings of emotional attachment to the ex-spouse. Mothers' divorce non-acceptance has been positively associated with depression (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). In addition, rumination and inability to "self-distance" have been associated with heightened risk for mood disorders (Kross, Gard, Deldin, Clifton, & Ayduk, 2012). In turn, individuals who remain

preoccupied with their divorces may become over-involved with or ruminate on their experiences, leading them to get “stuck” experiencing negative thoughts and emotions (Sbarra, Smith, & Mehl, 2012). Given the previous findings, having an inability to psychologically detach from the former marriage and spouse is likely to result in mental health disturbances. I thus propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1A: Mothers’ emotional attachment to the ex-spouse will predict increased depressive symptoms in this sample.

Prior research has also consistently associated mothers’ depression with increased problem behaviors for children following divorce (Amato, 2010; Di Stefano & Cyr, 2014; Lansford, 2009; Stallman & Ohan, 2016). Scholars have noted a number of pathways by which this association can occur. First, parents’ mental health has been shown to significantly predict offspring mental health. For example, in a large Norwegian study of adolescents, parents’ distress (anxiety and depression) was found to significantly predict adolescents’ anxiety and depressive symptoms (Størksen, Røysamb, Holmen, & Tambs, 2006). On the other hand, it is possible that parents’ depressive symptoms affect their parenting practices. Specifically, Amato (2000) argued that depression among custodial mothers presumably detracts from their ability to focus on parenting, further resulting in with children’s adjustment difficulties. Mothers’ depression has also been associated with decreased tolerance to children’s behavior (Dix, Moed, & Anderson, 2014), which has also shown to affect children’s internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Stallman & Ohan, 2016). Given the previous findings for the effects of mothers’ depressive

symptoms on both emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior problems, I propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1B: Mothers' increased depressive symptoms will predict increased children's behavior problems in this sample.

Hypothesis 1C: Mothers' depressive symptoms will mediate the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior problems.

Disruptions in mothers' in parenting practices.

Divorce-related stressors, such as role or status changes, tend to preoccupy parents, leading them to demonstrate irritability with their children and inconsistent parenting practices (Greene, Anderson, Hetherington, Forgatch, & DeGarmo, 2003, p. 107). Given the stressors divorce adds to one's life, it is more difficult for divorced parents to monitor and supervise their children effectively (Amato, 1993; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996), provide warmth and affection (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999), and provide consistent parenting practices (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1977).

Parents who have emotional attachment to their former spouses may be at greater risk for experiencing disruptions in parenting practices. Kitson found that divorcing individuals with high levels of emotional attachment to the ex-spouse tended to be more self-absorbed with their own adjustment to divorce, which includes both emotional and logistical adjustment (Kitson, 1982). In fact, she found the highly attached noted single

parenthood as one of the most difficult adjustments to post-divorce life. Only when emotional attachment diminished were parents able to focus more attention to their children (Kitson, 1982). Kitson's results imply that those with high emotional attachment are more focused on the self than others, which includes children. Thus, it seems reasonable to expect that one would experience disruptions in parenting practices if emotional attachment to the ex-spouse is high. Given Kitson's findings, I propose an extension of findings in the current sample:

Hypothesis 2A: Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse will predict increased disruptions in parenting practices.

Prior research has consistently established that high-quality parenting attenuates the link between parental divorce and child adjustment (Amato, 2010). Warm, consistent, and supportive parenting practices serve as protective factors for children's post-divorce adjustment (Pickar, 2003), while parental anger and hostility have been shown to affect the reactivity parents have to their children's behavior (Stallman & Ohan, 2016) and promote child maladjustment. When parents display adverse parenting practices, such as anger, hostility, or inconsistency, children tend to exhibit increased noncompliance and anger (Greene et al., 2003, p. 107). During this process, mothers and sons specifically tend to engage in escalating, mutually coercive interactions (Greene et al., 2003, p. 107). Given the previous findings for the associations of diminished parenting practices with both emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior problems, I propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2B: Disruptions in parenting practices will predict increased problem behaviors for children in this sample.

Hypothesis 2C: Disruptions in parenting practices will mediate the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior, such as disagreements problems.

Co-parenting difficulties.

When divorced parents must remain in contact with one another, many sources of potential conflict arise over custody, child support payments, or parenting time. For divorced parents who are able to navigate positive relationships with their ex-spouses, co-parenting difficulties tend to decrease (Price et al., 1992). Dozier and colleagues have found that when an individual has more positive (i.e., less hostile) feelings toward his or her ex-spouse, a term they refer to as "friendly attachment," they are more likely to have a supportive shared co-parenting relationship. When individuals experience these friendly attachments, conflict around childrearing practices tend to decrease (Dozier et al., 1993).

Conversely when ex-spouses remain negatively attached, co-parent communication and parental involvement tend to decrease, particularly for fathers (Price et al., 1992). Prior research has shown that couples who have moderate levels of (negative) emotional attachment to their ex-spouses have a significantly easier time reaching agreement as compared with those with either low or high levels of attachment to their ex-spouses (Kitson, 1982). When one parent continues (or does not continue) to remain emotionally attached to his or her ex-spouse, it is possible that agreements would

be more difficult to reach, particularly if the other parent has does not reciprocate that same level of post-divorce attachment. Taken together, when emotional attachment to the ex-spouse is high, it is likely that the co-parenting difficulties would increase. I propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3A: Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse will predict increased co-parenting difficulties between the ex-spouses.

Research has also consistently linked co-parenting relationship difficulties to adjustment problems for children (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Pickar, 2003; Stallman & Ohan, 2016), while stable co-parenting relationships have been shown to mitigate the negative effects of divorce for children (Roberson, Sabo, & Wickel, 2011). In addition, inter-parental conflict, one facet of the co-parent relationship, has been continuously shown to influence children's adjustment, even more so than the divorce itself (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998). Inter-parental conflict has been shown to pose threats to children's emotional security and consequently predicts increased behavior problems for children (Cummings & Davies, 2010; Cummings, Schermerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2006; Davies & Cummings, 1994). In addition, because Price and her colleagues (1992) found that relationship ambiguity predicts decreased co-parent communication and parental involvement, it is plausible that children would be adversely affected. Given the previous findings for the associations of co-parenting difficulties with both emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior problems, I propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3B: Co-parenting difficulties will predict increased children's behavior problems in this sample.

Hypothesis 3C: Co-parenting difficulties will mediate the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior problems.

EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT AS A PREDICTOR OF CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

It is also possible that emotional attachment to the ex-spouse may have a direct effect on children's behavior problems. Researchers and clinicians have identified the ways in which parents disclose divorce-related information as critical points in the divorce adjustment process for children (Demo & Fine, 2010, p. 201); it is possible that the ways in which the divorce is disclosed would be affected by parents' reactions to the idea of divorce. When parents experience negative emotional attachment to the ex-spouse in the forms of divorce rumination or non-acceptance, the divorce process may seem ambiguous or unresolved to the child, which has implications for his or her adjustment. As Kitson (1982) notes, divorced individuals may experience conflicting emotions including relief that the relationship has ended as well as grief over the loss of the relationship. These contradictory emotions may be communicated to the child, providing an ambiguous frame for the child to understand the divorce. Thus, Albert Bandura's (1992) social cognitive theory of social referencing provides some rationale for why children may be adversely affected.

According to the social cognitive theory of social referencing, children evaluate parents' actions, affective expressions, and verbalized thoughts to better comprehend ambiguous situations and guide their own behaviors (Bandura & Feinman, 1992). During times of uncertainty, such as divorce, observed expressions serve as both indicators and vicarious arousers of emotion. As the observer (i.e., child) experiences a growth of knowledge and cognitive-processing capabilities with age, he or she will be better equipped to consider external threats to his or her environment and assert greater significance contextual information (Bandura & Feinman, 1992; Power, 2004). In other words, while infants may only look to their parents for nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, older children are more attuned to what and why something is happening, but also what they can do about it, and what it means for the future (Power, 2004). While it is likely that children have already witnessed a gamut of negative emotions both leading up to and following his or her parents' divorce, emotions expressed as a result of mothers' emotional attachment, which occurs as a result of the divorce itself, are likely to be imitated by children. Thus, I propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Mothers' changes in emotional attachment to the ex-spouse will be associated with increased problem behaviors for children even after controlling for any significant relations in the mediation models. Specifically, high initial levels of emotional attachment will be associated with increased problem behaviors, while declines will be associated with improvements in adjustment.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Data for this study are part of a multi-method, multi-informant longitudinal study of parental repartnering after divorce and its influence on child and family outcomes (Anderson & Greene, 2005). Participants were recruited through divorce court records in a metropolitan area of Southern Central United States. Eligible families had at least one elementary-school aged (i.e., kindergarten through 5th grade) “target” child who resided with his or her mother at least 50% of each week ($N = 319$). This was the first divorce for 77% of mothers, the second divorce for 15% of mothers, and eight percent of the mothers had more than two prior divorces. The average length of marriage was 122.26 months (range: 8-321 months) and the average length of separation from the former spouse was 14.56 months (median: 6.00 months, range: 0-103 months). Mean age of mothers was 36.79 years ($SD = 6.59$; range 21-53 years), and the majority identified as non-Hispanic white (64%), whereas the rest of the sample identified as Hispanic (27%) or African American (9%). Mothers’ education level varied from less than high school (9.4%) to doctoral degree (1.3%) with the median education being a two-year Associate’s degree. Although 82% of the mothers were working in paid positions at least part-time, 23% of mothers received some means of governmental assistance. All children who participated in the study were the biological or adoptive children of the parents who filed for divorce. The target children were almost evenly split by gender (52% female), and the mean number of children living in the household was 2.07 ($SD = .90$). The average age of the

target child was 8.26 years ($SD = 1.99$). The demographics of mothers and children reflect the area in which participants were recruited and are summarized in Table 1.

PROCEDURE

From divorce court records, recruitment brochures were mailed to the most recent address, and a follow-up phone call took place to verify eligibility. Subsequently eligible families were invited to participate in a “get-acquainted” visit in the family’s home to answer questions about participation. Eighty-eight percent of families who agreed to the get-acquainted visit accepted participation. Participants who agreed to participate in the study ($N=319$) were first interviewed within 120 days of divorce filing (the “baseline” assessment). Interviews took place in the families’ homes at baseline, and 12-month and 24-month follow-up assessments. Two-person interview teams conducted structured interviews with the target child and the mother in separate areas of the home. Mothers and children also participated together in 12-minute videotaped observations. During breaks in the interview (e.g., when the interviewers set up and took down the video equipment), mothers completed self-report questionnaires by themselves. Additionally, mothers completed assessments at 6- and 18-months of the study, either by mail or phone. Both mothers’ consent and children’s assent were required for participation in the study.

Loss of participants over time occurred due to various factors, including: ineligibility (which primarily occurred due to reconciliation or changes in custody), temporary loss of contact (e.g., participants completed the 24-month assessment but not

the 18-month assessment), and dropout. In this sample, 74.0% of mothers completed all five assessments, 11.3% completed four assessments, 3.8% completed three assessments, 4.0% completed two assessments, and 6.9% completed only the baseline assessment. Families received \$50 for completing the baseline assessment, \$75 for the 12-month assessment, \$100 for the 24-month assessment, and \$30 for the 6- and 18-month assessments. All procedures were approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board.

MEASURES²

Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse. Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse was derived from Kitson's (1982) measure of attachment to the ex-spouse, and was obtained at the baseline, 6-month, 12-month, 18-month, 24-month, and supplemental assessments. This scale was composed of six items that reflected non-acceptance of the marital termination, such as "I find myself spending a lot of time thinking about my ex-spouse" and "I feel I will never get over the divorce." Answer choices ranged from 0 (*Not at all true*) to 4 (*Very true*). Internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.84$), and the average emotional attachment score across all waves was 0.49 ($SD = 0.71$) Post-hoc descriptive analyses demonstrated that this measure is linear in nature, such that the average mother's emotional attachment to the ex-spouse declines over time. Mean emotional attachment scores at each wave are listed in Table 2. The mean inter-item correlation= 0.47 and was thus acceptable according to Clark at

² Please see Appendix A for the complete set of items included in all measures.

Watson's (1995) recommendations. Emotional attachment across all five waves was slightly positively skewed (Skewness= 2.13), demonstrating that mothers, on average, reported low levels of emotional attachment to their ex-spouses. This measure was also leptokurtic (Kurtosis= 4.89).

Mothers' depressive symptoms. Mothers' depressive symptoms were measured at the baseline, 6-month, 12-month, 18-month, 24-month, and supplemental assessments using the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). This scale was composed of 20³ items and assessed depressive symptoms over the last week. Sample items included, "I felt lonely," "I had crying spells," and "I felt sad," and response choices ranged from 0 (*Not at all*) to 3 (*Most or all of the time*). Scores were totaled, and total scores of 16 or greater met the threshold for clinical depression. The average total score for depressive symptoms was 14.03 ($SD = 10.39$), and mean scores at each wave are listed in Table 2. At the baseline assessment, the mean depression score was 16.35, indicating that the average mother met the threshold for clinical depression (Radloff, 1977). Scores, however, were within normal range (Skewness=0.98, Kurtosis=0.69). The measure displayed acceptable internal consistency in this sample ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Disruptions mothers' in parenting practices. At the baseline, 12-month, 24-month, and supplemental assessments, mothers and children completed a 12-minute

³ One item, "I was bothered by things that don't usually bother me," was inadvertently omitted when the interview packet went to the printer. Thus, our scale consisted of 19 items. Total scores were converted to the 20-item scale to allow comparability with prior studies.

conflict discussion task where they were asked to discuss an area of disagreement. Throughout the conflict discussion task, mothers' and children's conflict discussions were videotaped and coded using the Family and Peer Process Coding System (Stubbs, Crosby, Forgatch, & Capaldi, 1998), a microsocial sequential system, followed by global ratings. This coding system has been successfully used in a number of prior studies (e.g., Martinez & Forgatch, 2001, 2002.) Upon conducting a factor analysis of the 38 global rating items, seven distinct factors from 25 items emerged. Following Martinez and Forgatch (2001), I retained measures that most closely depicted effective parenting and coercive discipline. The two most robust factors, which conceptually represented constructs of positive and harsh parenting, were retained. The proposed analyses will use observations of a) mothers' harsh parenting and b) positive parenting, based on global ratings to demonstrate disruptions in parenting practices.

Harsh parenting: Eight of the 38 items loaded onto a factor reflecting harsh parenting. Example items are, “(Mother) used negative or hostile corrections,” “(Mother) threatened unlikely disciplines (e.g., consequences that are hard to enforce),” and “(Mother) used aversive techniques to get her way.” Responses ranged from 0 (*Very untrue*) to 6 (*Very true*). The average score for harsh parenting was 0.91 ($SD = 0.82$). Cronbach alphas across three waves of data collection were averaged, and the scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Positive Parenting: Five of the 38 items loaded onto a factor reflecting positive parenting. Example items are, “(Mother) skillfully prompted the youngster during the

task as necessary,” “(Mother) was positively responsive to the youngster’s questions/requests for assistance,” and “(Mother) showed willingness to discuss ideas suggested by the other.” Responses ranged from 0 (*Very untrue*) to 6 (*Very true*). The average score for positive parenting was 4.01 ($SD = 0.87$). Cronbach alphas across three waves of data collection were averaged, and the scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.84$).

Following Martinez and Forgatch (2001), the measure of positive parenting was reverse-scored and combined with the scale of harsh parenting to create a composite score of *Disruptions in Parenting Practices*. The two scales, harsh parenting and positive parenting, were correlated $r = -0.54$. The average score for disruptions in parenting practices was 1.45 ($SD = 0.74$), and mean scores at each wave are listed in Table 2.

Co-parenting difficulties. At the baseline, 12-month, and 24-month assessments, mothers reported on various areas of potential co-parenting difficulty, which included measures of (a) poor co-parenting communication and (b) conflict over childrearing practices.

Co-parenting communication: Co-parenting communication was assessed using a 5-item scale adapted from Braver et al. (1993). Example items include, “When there was a problem with the child(ren), you and he worked together to find the best way to handle it” and “Your ex-spouse had good judgment about how to solve problems with the child(ren). Responses ranged from 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Very often*). The average score for co-parenting communication was 2.11 ($SD = 1.12$). Cronbach alphas across three waves of

data collection were averaged, and the scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.91$).

Conflict over childrearing practices: Mothers reported the frequency of conflict with their ex-spouses over childrearing issues. Conflict over childrearing issues within the past month was measured using the 8-item co-parenting measure from Dumka et al. (2002). Sample items include, “You and he argued about discipline practices” and “You and he argued over moral values related to raising the child.” Responses ranged from 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Very often*). The average score for conflict over childrearing practices was 1.13 ($SD = 0.88$). Cronbach alphas across three waves of data collection were averaged, and the scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.78$).

For data analysis, the measure of co-parenting communication was reverse-scored (to reflect poor co-parenting communication) and combined with the conflict over childrearing practices scale to form a composite measure of *Co-parenting Difficulties*. The correlation between the two scales, co-parenting communication and conflict over childrearing practices, averaged $r = 0.20$. The average score for co-parenting difficulties was 1.42 ($SD = 0.73$), and scores at each wave are listed in Table 2.

Children’s behavior problems. Mothers answered questions pertaining to their children’s behavior at the baseline, 6-month, 12-month, 18-month, 24-month, and supplemental assessments using the Zill Behavior Problems Index (Peterson & Zill, 1986), which consisted of 30 items.

Internalizing behavior problems: Twelve of the 30 items corresponded to children's internalizing behaviors, such as "(Child) is unhappy, sullen, or irritable" and "(Child) is too fearful or anxious," with responses ranging from 0 (*Not true*) to 20 (*Often true*). The average score for internalizing behaviors was 3.11 ($SD = 2.95$), and average scores at each wave are listed in Table 2. Cronbach alphas across waves of data collection were averaged, and the scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.81$).

Externalizing behavior problems: Sixteen of the 30 items corresponded to children's externalizing behaviors, such as "(Child) has a very strong temper and loses it easily" and "(Child) is withdrawn, doesn't get involved with others." Responses ranged from 0 (*Not true*) to 20 (*Often true*). The average score for externalizing behaviors was 4.73 ($SD = 3.43$), and average scores at each wave are listed in Table 2. Cronbach alphas across waves of data collection were averaged, and the scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$).

Total behavior problems: Responses from all 30 items were averaged to create a variable called *Total Behavior Problems*. The average score for total problem behaviors was 3.95 ($SD = 2.87$), and average scores at each wave are listed in Table 2. Cronbach alphas across waves of data collection were averaged, and the scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.91$).

Control variables. A number of demographic and parenting factors have been found to increase individuals' risk for experiencing emotional attachment to the ex-spouse; I will include these variables as covariates in my analyses. As mentioned, lower

socioeconomic status (Berman, 1985) and shorter length of separation (Kitson, 1982) have been associated with experiencing greater emotional attachment to the ex-spouse. At the baseline assessment, mothers reported their education status based on the following question: “What is the highest grade in school you completed or the highest degree you received?” Responses ranged from 1 (*8th grade or less*) to 13 (*Advanced college degree, Doctoral*), with the median, 7, representing some college (*Less than 2 years*). Regarding income, mothers were asked, “Thinking about the income you received during the previous year from *all* sources, like wages or salary, child support, alimony, income from your own business, unemployment, etc., what is your best guess what your income before taxes will be?” Mothers’ responses ranged from 1 (*Less than \$5,000 per year*) to 17 (*\$80,000 or more per year*), where subsequent responses represented a \$5,000 boost from a previous response (e.g., 2 = \$5,000 to \$9,999). Mothers reported the length of marital separation (in months) at the baseline assessment as well. In addition, because the number of children, specifically number of male children, has been shown to increase the risk of experiencing emotional attachment to the ex-spouse (Berman, 1985), it is important to consider child characteristics that may enhance emotional attachment. Mothers reported the age (in months), gender, and number of children at the baseline assessment. Covariates will be included if they significantly relate to the outcome in question.

Analytic Approach

For this investigation, I addressed my hypotheses through multi-level models using hierarchical linear modeling techniques (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This approach captures between- and within-person effects of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse. In addition, HLM accounts for missing data using Full Maximum Likelihood. (HLM deletes cases for which data is missing at level-2 (between-person); however, no information was missing at the between-person level for mothers. Data was only missing at level-1 (within-person) if mothers did not complete the 6-month, 12-month, 18-month, or 24-month assessments.) In addition, time in the study was also included as a level-1 predictor in each of the models to control for changes in children's problem behaviors independent of emotional attachment, depressive symptoms, disruptions in parenting practices, or co-parenting difficulties. Finally, all primary constructs were centered around the grand mean in order to account for between-person variation.

For the first three hypotheses, two separate models were conducted to assess the direct effects of emotional attachment to the mediating variable (e.g., mothers' depressive symptoms, mothers' disruptions in parenting practices, and co-parenting difficulties) and direct effects of each mediating variable on children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems. A third model was used to assess the indirect effects of emotional attachment on children's behavior problems. Each of the three measures of children's behavior problems were tested separately. Results are presented in Tables 3-5.

Formal tests of within-subject mediation were conducted simultaneously, rather than separately, and involved estimating two multilevel regression equations concurrently. These within-subject tests of mediation further followed procedures described by Bolger and Laurenceau (2013, p. 182) and were analyzed using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). Results for the formal tests of within-subject mediation are presented in Table 6.

For the fourth hypothesis, I used multi-level modeling techniques (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) to assess the direct effect of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems, while adjusting for any significant predictors found in the previous models. Figure 1 provides the simplified conceptual model for all analyses for clarification.

All models were run both with and without the following control variables at the between-person level of analysis via the intercept for each model: Mothers' education and pre-separation income; length of separation; focal children's age and gender; the interaction between children's age and gender; and number of children in the family. The results did not change significantly after including the control variables. For parsimony, all results will be unadjusted. Adjusted analyses are included in Appendix B.

Due to the non-normality of the predictor variable, emotional attachment, the measure was subjected to a logarithmic transformation. The results did not change significantly when including this variable. For ease of interpretation, all results will include the non-transformed measure of emotional attachment. None of the other study variables were non-normally distributed.

Results

MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT, MOTHERS' DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS, AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Results for the tests of Hypotheses 1A-B can be found in Table 3. Hypothesis 1A stated that mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse would significantly predict increases in mothers' depressive symptoms. Results indicate that increases in mothers' emotional attachment are significantly associated with increases in mothers' depressive symptoms ($b = 4.22, p < 0.001$). In addition, the coefficient for the rate of change indicates that mothers' depressive symptoms decrease over time. Therefore, Hypothesis 1A is supported.

Hypothesis 1B stated that increases in mothers' depressive symptoms would be significantly associated with increases in children's behavior problems. Results demonstrate that increases in mothers' depressive symptoms are significantly associated with increases in children's internalizing ($b = 0.06, p < 0.001$), externalizing ($b = 0.05, p < 0.001$), and total ($b = 0.05, p < 0.001$) behavior problems. Therefore, Hypothesis 1B is supported for internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems.

Hypothesis 1C stated that mothers' depressive symptoms would mediate the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior problems. Model 1C results demonstrate that, when controlling for mothers' emotional attachment, mothers' depressive symptoms are still significantly associated with

increases in children's internalizing ($b = 0.06, p < 0.001$), externalizing ($b = 0.05, p < 0.001$), and total ($b = 0.05, p < 0.001$) behavior problems. Yet, in the presence of mothers' depressive symptoms, mothers' emotional attachment has no direct relation to children's internalizing, externalizing, or total behavior problems. Based on these results, it would appear that mothers' depressive symptoms fully mediates the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems. Formal tests of mediation indicate that mediation was significant only for internalizing and total behavior problems (Table 6). Eighty-one and 47% of the total effects were explained by mediation, respectively.

MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT, DISRUPTIONS MOTHERS' IN PARENTING, AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Results for the tests of Hypotheses 2A-B can be found in Table 4. Hypothesis 2A stated that mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse would significantly predict increases in disruptions in mothers' parenting practices. Results indicate that increases in mothers' emotional attachment are not significantly associated with increased disruptions in mothers' parenting practices. Therefore, Hypothesis 2A is not supported. The coefficient for the rate of change indicates that disruptions in mothers' parenting practices does not significantly change over time.

Hypothesis 2B stated that increased disruptions in mothers' parenting practices would be significantly associated with increases in children's behavior problems. Results demonstrate that increased disruptions in mothers' parenting practices are significantly

associated with increased externalizing behavior problems ($b = 0.30, p < 0.01$) and marginally associated with increased total behavior problems ($b = 0.17, p = 0.07$), but are not significantly associated with increased internalizing behaviors. Therefore, Hypothesis 2B is supported for externalizing, but not internalizing or total behavior problems.

Hypothesis 2C stated that disruptions in mothers' parenting practices would mediate the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior problems. Results demonstrate that, when controlling for mothers' emotional attachment, disruptions in mothers' parenting practices are still significantly associated with increases in children's externalizing ($b = 0.29, p < 0.01$) behavior problems and marginally associated with increased total behavior problems ($b = 0.18, p = 0.06$). Yet, when controlling for disruptions in parenting practices, mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse significantly predict increases in internalizing ($b = 0.31, p < 0.05$) and total behavior problems ($b = 0.28, p < 0.05$), and marginally predict increases in externalizing behavior problems ($b = 0.29, p = 0.05$). However, because there was no direct effect of mothers' emotional attachment on disruptions in parenting practices, the test of formal mediation was not significant (Table 6). Therefore, Hypothesis 2C was not supported.

MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT, CO-PARENTING DIFFICULTIES, AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Results for the tests of Hypotheses 3A-B can be found in Table 5. Hypothesis 3A stated that mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse would significantly predict increases in co-parenting difficulties. Results indicate that increases in mothers' emotional attachment are not significantly associated with increased co-parenting difficulties. Therefore, Hypothesis 3A is not supported. In addition, the coefficient for the rate of change indicates that co-parenting difficulties do not significantly change over time.

Hypothesis 3B stated that increased co-parenting difficulties would be significantly associated with increases in children's behavior problems. Results demonstrate that increased co-parenting difficulties are significantly associated with increased internalizing behavior problems ($b = 0.26, p < 0.05$) and marginally associated with increased total behavior problems ($b = 0.22, p = 0.06$), but are not significantly associated with increased externalizing behaviors for children. Therefore, Hypothesis 3B is supported for internalizing, but not externalizing or total behavior problems.

Hypothesis 3C stated that co-parenting difficulties would mediate the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior problems. Results indicate that, when controlling for mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse, co-parenting difficulties significantly predict increased internalizing ($b = 0.30, p < 0.05$) and total ($b = 0.23, p < 0.05$) behavior problems for children. However,

because there was no direct effect of mothers' emotional attachment on co-parenting difficulties, the formal test of mediation was not significant (Table 6). Therefore, Hypothesis 3C was also not supported.

TOTAL EFFECTS OF MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT ON CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Results for the tests of Hypothesis 4 can be found in Table 7. Similar to changes in mothers' depressive symptoms, the negative coefficient for rate of change indicates that children's internalizing, externalizing, and total problem behavior show improvement over time. Hypothesis 4 stated that changes in mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse would be associated with increased problem behaviors for children even after controlling for any significant relations in the mediation models. Although the total effect of mother's emotional attachment is significant for all three outcomes, results indicate that once adjusting for mothers' depression there is no direct relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's internalizing, externalizing, or total behavior problems. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Discussion

To date, limited information is known about the influence of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse for children's post-divorce adjustment. In line with previous research findings (Kitson, 1982; Price et al., 1992), I hypothesized that mothers' emotional attachment would be associated with mothers' depressive symptoms, disruptions in parenting practices, and co-parenting difficulties, while each of those factors would be significantly directly associated with children's behavior problems. I then hypothesized that mothers' depressive symptoms, disruptions in parenting practices, and co-parenting difficulties would mediate the effect of mothers' emotional attachment on children's behavior problems. My final hypothesis stated that mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse would be significantly directly related to children's behavior problems. Results broadly indicated that mothers' depressive symptoms fully mediated the relation between mothers' emotional attachment and children's problem behaviors. While I initially found a significant (unadjusted) direct effect of mothers' emotional attachment on children's behavior problems, this effect disappeared once I accounted for mothers' depressive symptoms. Thus, understanding mothers' emotional attachment as a risk factor for depressive symptoms is critical in understanding children's post-divorce adjustment.

MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT, MOTHERS' DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS, AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Results indicate that mothers' emotional attachment has implications for children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems following divorce. More specifically, results demonstrate that there is a significant direct effect of mothers' emotional attachment on her depressive symptoms; in addition, there is a significant total effect of mothers' depressive symptoms on children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems. Mothers' depressive symptoms fully mediate the relation between mothers' emotional attachment on children's internalizing and total problem behaviors. First, these results replicate previous findings that suggest custodial parents' mental health, particularly depressive symptoms, has implications for children's well-being and adjustment following divorce. In addition, results imply that mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse is a significant risk factor for changes in depressive symptoms over time, and this process indirectly has consequences for children's behavior problems. In other words, when mothers are emotionally attached, children may be more attuned to their mothers' mood and behavior, and children's behavior changes accordingly. Children may begin internalizing or have more general behavior problems in direct response to their mothers' depressive symptoms following divorce.

Mothers' depressive symptoms did not mediate the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's externalizing behaviors. This

finding is suggests that mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse has a significant influence on children's externalizing behaviors that is statistically independent of mothers' depressive symptoms. Therefore, mothers who remain emotionally attached to their ex-spouses demonstrate some behaviors, other than depressive symptoms, that increase the likelihood for their children to act out. Future investigations should attempt to uncover the mechanisms by which negative emotional attachment to the ex-spouse influences children's externalizing behaviors.

MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT, DISRUPTIONS IN MOTHERS' PARENTING, AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Consistent with previous research, there is a significant effect of disruptions in mothers' parenting practices on children's externalizing behaviors. Yet, inconsistent with previous research, results indicate that there is no direct effect of mothers' emotional attachment to their disruptions in parenting practices. There are several possible explanations for why I found no direct effect of mothers' emotional attachment to their disruptions in parenting practices. First, the measure of disruptions in parenting practices only included observed parenting during conflict discussion tasks where parents and children were asked to discuss an area of disagreement. Although Kitson (1982) suggested that individuals who remain emotionally attached to their ex-spouses tend to focus more on their own emotions than others', it is possible that emotionally attached mothers can, generally, still function effectively in their parenting roles.

Alternatively, however, mothers who are emotionally attached may be less likely to provide effective emotional support to their children when the parenting tasks involve issues that directly relate to divorce or the ex-spouses. Thus, when parenting pertains to issues unrelated to the divorce or ex-spouse, such as schoolwork or household chores, mothers can remain effective in their parenting roles. If the topic of disagreement were to shift to more sensitive issues relevant to the ex-spouse (the child's father), then she might exhibit less effective parenting. Future studies should seek to disentangle parenting practices when parents and children are forced to address sensitive issues related to the divorce or the ex-spouse.

In addition, it may also be important to consider how mothers' emotional states during periods of high emotional attachment influence their parenting practices. Given the current findings regarding the significant effect of mothers' emotional attachment on their depressive symptoms, parenting practices are likely to be related to mothers' emotional states as they experience emotional attachment. As such, mothers' parenting may be more related to lack of support and reactivity than negative (e.g., hostile, explosive) parenting. It is possible that mothers who exhibit emotional attachment to their ex-spouses would be more likely to behave in more depressed ways, such as exhibiting poor concentration, fatigue, or irritability. I plan to assess how mothers' emotional attachment and depressive symptoms impact their observed depressive symptoms and negative reactivity to the child and ex-spouse using the same dataset (Dix, Moed, & Anderson, 2014).

MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT, CO-PARENTING DIFFICULTIES, AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Consistent with prior research, this study found co-parenting to be significantly related to increases in children's internalizing. However, inconsistent with previous research, results indicated no direct effect of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on their co-parenting difficulties. There are several possible explanations for why we found no direct effect of mothers' emotional attachment on co-parenting difficulties. The current co-parenting measure may not adequately reflect qualities that influence mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse, such as ex-spouse's repartnering status. That is, emotional attachment may be less influential when conflict with the ex-spouse involves benign issues related to childrearing. When conflict involves issues related to emotional attachment directly, however, emotionally attached mothers may have greater difficulty. For instance, it may be the case that mothers who remain emotionally attached experience greater co-parenting difficulties with their ex-spouses over topics related to their exes' new romantic partners. Future studies should investigate the extent to which mothers' emotional attachment relates to conflict with the ex-spouse over more sensitive issues that may relate to emotional attachment, such as the ex-spouses' repartnering status and dating behaviors.

Relatedly, emotional attachment may be similarly associated with co-parenting difficulties if mothers use their children as vehicles to obtain information about the ex-spouses' private lives. Because emotional attachment has been associated with the

experience of preoccupation and rumination, mothers who remain emotionally attached are likely to experience preoccupation about and ruminate over their ex-spouses and the decision to divorce. Therefore, emotionally attached mothers would likely remain preoccupied with and ruminate over their ex-spouses' lives following the divorce. Because research has shown that, following separation, exes with children often use children as vehicles to spy on their exes (Kalter, 1987), emotional attachment may be most related to co-parenting difficulties when mothers use their children as vehicles to spy on their exes' personal lives following divorce. Future research should consider co-parenting difficulties as they directly relate to preoccupations with the ex-spouse following divorce.

TOTAL EFFECTS OF MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT ON CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Results indicate that there is a significant bivariate relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems. Yet, those results disappear in the presence of the significant mediator, mothers' depressive symptoms. As mentioned above, this demonstrates the vital importance of understanding exactly what depressed mothers do that increase their children's internalizing, externalizing and total behavior problems. In other words, it is critical to uncover what, specifically, mothers' emotional attachment portrays to their children that increases the likelihood that they will exhibit behavior problems. Future studies ought to examine how depressive symptoms, and behaviors that occur as a result

of experiencing depressive symptoms, influence factors such as parenting practices and co-parenting difficulties.

The results of the current study provide insight for clinicians and professionals working with divorced families. Professionals may help to promote post-divorce adjustment by acknowledging the potential consequences of mothers experiencing emotional attachment to their former spouses, particularly when clients begin the divorce process. In addition, the results highlight the importance of acknowledging how experiencing emotional attachment to the ex-spouse may influence mental health difficulties and, possibly as a result, parenting behaviors. In addition, special consideration should be given to children during this time, as children may also experience emotional attachment to their non-residential parents and the former family structure.

Limitations and Conclusions

This study is not without limitations. First, mothers' emotional attachment, depressive symptoms, and co-parenting difficulties and children's behavior problems were all reported by mothers, which may influence the results. First, because mothers report their own depressive symptoms and their children's behavior problems, the conceptual overlap between the measures may be inflated. For instance, when mothers are depressed, they are more likely to see the behaviors of themselves and others in a negative light (i.e., horn effect). Therefore, mothers remain emotionally attached and experience high depressive symptoms may be more likely to over-report their children's behavior problems. Future research that involves independent measures of children's behavior problems is necessary to clarify the exact influence of mothers' emotional attachment and depressive symptoms on children's behavior problems.

It is critical to consider the ways in which genetics, or the transmission of depressive symptoms in both mothers and children, influences the mediating effect of mothers' depressive symptoms on the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and children's behavior problems. For instance, mothers who are genetically predisposed to experience depression may have children who are similarly predisposed to experiencing behavior problems, independent of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse. Yet, this study lacks a concrete measure of genetic predisposition to depression, such as neuroticism, to control for in analyses.

A more sensitive measure of co-parenting may be necessary to fully address the relation between mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse and the ex-spousal relationship. Mothers who remain (negatively) emotionally attached to their ex-spouses may be biased about their ex-spouses' co-parenting behaviors and the actual amount of difficulty they experience with their ex-spouses. For instance, if mothers remain extremely emotionally attached to their ex-spouses, it is possible that they will be particularly negative about their exes' abilities to effectively co-parent or take care of children. The current measure of co-parenting difficulties may not adequately capture this dynamic. While it is still extremely useful to understand mothers' perceptions of their exes' abilities to effectively co-parent and care for their children, as those perceptions likely influence the amount of co-parenting difficulties that arise, the reported results may not adequately capture the ex-spouses' co-parenting or parenting effectiveness. Although extremely difficult to obtain, future studies should attempt to assess co-parenting difficulties from both parents in order to parcel out biases and discrepancies.

It should also be noted that the co-parenting difficulties measure presupposed contact between parents. Therefore, only mothers who had contact with their child(ren)'s fathers over the course of the study answered items about co-parenting communication and conflict over child-rearing. The study therefore could not assess co-parenting difficulties for families in which co-parenting difficulties possibly would have been the greatest. In addition, if mothers and fathers did not have contact with one another, it is possible that children, in addition to experiencing the divorce, were also pining the loss of

their fathers. Future investigations should be thoughtful in assessing the level of contact between fathers, mothers, and children when attempting to understand the influence of family post-divorce adjustment on children's problem behaviors.

Lastly, analyses reported in this study assume linear changes in mothers' experience of emotional attachment to the ex-spouse. More complex developmental changes in emotional attachment, such as more rapid decline in emotional attachment at the onset of divorce followed by more steady changes, would obscure potential relations with other factors. Future investigations should test for the curvilinear trajectories in the data.

In sum, this study is the first of its kind to examine the effects of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on children's behavior problems following divorce. While emotional attachment may not directly influence children's behavior problems, mothers' depressive symptoms fully mediated the effect of mothers' emotional attachment on children's problem behaviors. Therefore, mothers' emotional attachment is a critical factor in understanding children's post-divorce adjustment, in large part, due to the consequences of emotional attachment for changes in mother's mental health and well-being. Mothers' mental health problems have consistently been identified as risk factors for children's behavior problems. This study provides empirical support for the specific family adjustment processes that may influence children's adjustment through post-divorce stress.

Tables

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the sample (N=319)

Variable	Mean	SD
Mother characteristics		
Age (years)	36.79	6.59
Race (%)		
White	63.90	-
African American	9.40	-
Hispanic	26.60	-
Education level category ^a	8.03	2.67
Previous year income category ^b	10.75	5.42
Income at baseline category ^b	8.94	4.57
Length of time married (months)	122.26	65.21
Length of separation (months)	14.56	20.62
Number of children	2.07	0.90
Child characteristics		
Age (years)	8.26	1.99
Gender (Female, %)	51.70	-

^a Measured on a scale of 1 (8th grade or less) to 13 (Advanced college degree, Doctoral)

^b Measured on a scale of 1 (Less than \$5,000 per year) to 17 (\$80,000 or more)

Table 2. N, Means (SD) for predictors and outcomes

Variable	Wave																	
	Baseline		6m follow-up		12m follow-up		18m follow-up		24m follow-up		Supplemental 1		Supplemental 2		Supplemental 3		Total Observations	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)
Emotional attachment to the ex-spouse	319	0.73 (0.81)	219	0.59 (0.78)	259	0.42 (0.64)	228	0.38 (0.62)	272	0.32 (0.58)	41	0.35 (0.82)	4	0.13 (0.16)	1	0.00 (*)	1343	0.49 (0.71)
Mothers' depressive symptoms	318	16.35 (10.23)	218	14.32 (10.30)	236	12.31 (9.66)	226	14.56 (11.36)	274	12.78 (10.12)	72	12.06 (9.71)	11	12.72 (10.25)	1	2.11 (*)	1356	14.03 (10.39)
Disruptions in mothers' parenting practices	317	1.43 (0.71)	-	-	258	1.42 (0.77)	-	-	250	1.46 (0.75)	70	1.50 (0.75)	10	1.78 (0.93)	1	1.02 (*)	906	1.45 (0.74)
Co-parenting difficulties	296	1.41 (0.76)	-	-	233	1.45 (0.73)	-	-	250	1.39 (0.69)	-	-	-	-	-	-	779	1.42 (0.73)
Children's internalizing behaviors	319	3.58 (2.95)	220	2.85 (3.04)	265	2.99 (2.73)	229	2.83 (2.95)	274	3.24 (3.06)	41	2.42 (2.70)	4	2.30 (1.42)	1	2.50 (*)	1353	3.11 (2.95)

Table 2, cont'd. N, Means (SD) for predictors and outcomes

Variable	Wave																	
	Baseline		6m follow-up		12m follow-up		18m follow-up		24m follow-up		Supplemental 1		Supplemental 2		Supplemental 3		Total Observations	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)
Children's externalizing behaviors	319	5.51 (3.32)	220	4.32 (3.43)	265	4.96 (3.45)	229	3.98 (3.45)	274	4.68 (3.33)	41	4.25 (3.78)	4	3.28 (0.60)	1	3.13 (*)	1353	4.73 (3.43)
Children's total behavior problems	319	4.59 (2.78)	220	3.60 (2.94)	265	4.02 (2.79)	229	3.41 (2.90)	274	3.96 (2.84)	41	3.43 (3.06)	4	2.75 (0.88)	1	3.00 (*)	1353	3.95 (2.87)

Note. *= Sample size too small to compute standard deviation.

Table 3. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse, mothers' depressive symptoms, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Mothers' Depressive Symptoms			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	14.75*** (0.50)		
Rate of Change	-0.67* (0.30)		
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse	4.22*** (0.42)		
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	38.78		
Level-2			
Initial status	50.36		
Rate of change	7.73		
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	9201.53		
<i>AIC</i>	9215.53		
<i>BIC</i>	9219.06		
Internalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		3.21*** (0.15)	3.17 *** (0.15)
Rate of Change		-0.09 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse			0.13 (0.12)
Mothers' depressive symptoms		0.06*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		2.74	2.75
Level-2			
Initial status		5.12	5.12
Rate of change		0.33	0.33
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		5800.77	5769.74
<i>AIC</i>		5814.77	5785.74
<i>BIC</i>		5818.30	5789.77
Externalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		5.09*** (0.18)	5.06*** (0.18)
Rate of Change		-0.34*** (0.07)	-0.31*** (0.08)

Table 3, cont'd. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse, mothers' depressive symptoms, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Initial Status		5.09*** (0.18)	5.06*** (0.18)
Rate of Change		-0.34*** (0.07)	-0.31*** (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse			0.13 (0.13)
Mothers' depressive symptoms		0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		3.09	3.10
Level-2			
Initial status		7.81	7.82
Rate of change		0.17	0.19
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		6018.00	5989.17
<i>AIC</i>		6032.00	6005.17
<i>BIC</i>		6035.53	6009.20
Total Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		4.19*** (0.15)	4.17*** (0.15)
Rate of Change		-0.24*** (0.06)	-0.21** (0.07)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse			0.13 (0.12)
Mothers' depressive symptoms		0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		2.19	2.19
Level-2			
Initial status		5.23	5.24
Rate of change		0.13	0.15
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		5547.39	5520.70
<i>AIC</i>		5561.39	5536.70
<i>BIC</i>		5564.92	5540.73

Note. All models are unadjusted; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 4. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' attachment to the ex-spouse, disruptions in mothers' parenting, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Disruptions in Mothers' Parenting Practices			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	1.42*** (0.04)		
Rate of Change	0.02 (0.03)		
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse	0.01 (0.04)		
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	0.38		
Level-2			
Initial status	0.13		
Rate of change	0.00		
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	1839.41		
<i>AIC</i>	1853.41		
<i>BIC</i>	1856.94		
Internalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		3.44*** (0.16)	3.38*** (0.16)
Rate of Change		-0.19* (0.08)	-0.13 (0.09)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse			0.31* (0.14)
Disruptions in mothers' parenting practices		0.07 (0.12)	-0.09 (0.11)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		2.41	2.39
Level-2			
Initial status		5.80	5.74
Rate of change		0.57	0.59
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3953.45	3914.67
<i>AIC</i>		3967.45	3930.67
<i>BIC</i>		3970.98	3934.70
Externalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		5.42*** (0.18)	5.36*** (0.19)

Table 4, cont'd. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' attachment to the ex-spouse, disruptions in mothers' parenting, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Rate of Change		-0.38*** (0.08)	-0.31*** (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse			0.29~ (0.15)
Disruptions in mothers' parenting practices		0.30** (0.11)	0.29** (0.11)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		2.66	2.67
Level-2			
Initial status		8.46	8.49
Rate of change		0.18	0.19
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		4054.61	4023.59
<i>AIC</i>		4068.61	4039.59
<i>BIC</i>		4072.14	4043.62
Total Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		4.48*** (0.15)	4.43*** (0.16)
Rate of Change		-0.30*** (0.07)	-0.24*** (0.07)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse			0.28* (0.12)
Disruptions in mothers' parenting practices		0.17~ (0.09)	0.18~ (0.09)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		1.81	1.81
Level-2			
Initial status		5.84	5.85
Rate of change		0.23	0.25
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3751.70	3720.84
<i>AIC</i>		3765.70	3736.84
<i>BIC</i>		3769.23	3740.87

Note. All models are unadjusted; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 5. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' attachment to the ex-spouse, co-parenting difficulties, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct Effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Co-parenting Difficulties			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	1.43*** (0.04)		
Rate of Change	-0.01 (0.02)		
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse	-0.02 (0.04)		
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	0.20		
Level-2			
Initial status	0.37		
Rate of change	0.02		
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	1491.23		
<i>AIC</i>	1505.23		
<i>BIC</i>	1508.76		
Internalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		3.46*** (0.16)	3.40*** (0.16)
Rate of Change		-0.23** (0.08)	-0.18* (0.09)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse			0.27~ (0.14)
Co-parenting difficulties		0.26* (0.13)	0.30* (0.13)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		2.20	2.19
Level-2			
Initial status		5.88	5.83
Rate of change		0.65	0.64
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3531.12	3499.79
<i>AIC</i>		3545.12	3515.79
<i>BIC</i>		3548.65	3519.82
Externalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		5.47*** (0.19)	5.42*** (0.19)
Rate of Change		-0.47*** (0.08)	-0.42*** (0.09)

Table 5, cont'd. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' attachment to the ex-spouse, co-parenting difficulties, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse			0.21 (0.16)
Co-parenting difficulties		0.20 (0.14)	0.19 (0.14)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		2.53	2.56
Level-2			
Initial status		8.68	8.70
Rate of change		0.36	0.35
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3659.81	3635.16
<i>AIC</i>		3673.81	3651.16
<i>BIC</i>		3677.34	3655.19
Total Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		4.50*** (0.16)	4.46*** (0.16)
Rate of Change		-0.36*** (0.13)	-0.32*** (0.07)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse			0.21 (0.13)
Co-parenting difficulties		0.22~ (0.13)	0.23* (0.12)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		1.65	1.67
Level-2			
Initial status		5.82	5.82
Rate of change		0.32	0.32
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3357.45	3335.31
<i>AIC</i>		3371.45	3351.31
<i>BIC</i>		3374.98	3355.34

Note. All models are unadjusted; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 6. Tests of formal mediation

Outcomes	Total Effect	Mediation	% Explained by Mediation	r_{ab}
Mothers' depressive symptoms				
Internalizing behaviors	0.41* (0.18)	0.33** (0.11)	0.81* (0.38)	0.09 (0.14)
Externalizing behaviors	0.55*** (0.17)	0.14 (0.12)	0.25 (0.20)	-0.10 (0.14)
Total behavior problems	0.47*** (0.14)	0.22* (0.10)	0.47* (0.20)	-0.03 (0.14)
Disruptions in mothers' parenting practices				
Internalizing behaviors	0.44** (0.17)	-0.00 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.12)	0.02 (0.39)
Externalizing behaviors	0.56*** (0.16)	0.01 (0.05)	0.01 (0.09)	0.05 (0.56)
Total behavior problems	0.49*** (0.13)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.09)	0.07 (0.53)
Co-parenting difficulties				
Internalizing behaviors	0.42*** (0.17)	0.02 (0.08)	0.05 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.16)
Externalizing behaviors	0.54*** (0.16)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.13 (0.18)	-0.15 (0.18)
Total behavior problems	0.47*** (0.13)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.16)	-0.08 (0.17)

*Note. All models are unadjusted; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$*

Table 7. Direct effects of time-varying emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems

Outcomes	Model		
	Unconditional Growth	Conditional Growth	
Internalizing Behaviors		Unadjusted	Adjusted
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	3.28*** (0.15)	3.21*** (0.15)	3.17*** (0.15)
Rate of Change	-0.18* (0.07)	-0.11 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		0.39** (0.12)	0.13 (0.12)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	2.75	2.73	2.75
Level-2			
Initial status	5.76	5.64	5.12
Rate of change	0.47	0.48	0.33
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	6006.76	5955.28	5769.74
<i>AIC</i>	6018.76	5969.28	5785.74
<i>BIC</i>	6021.78	5972.81	5789.77
Externalizing Behaviors			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	5.18*** (0.18)	5.11*** (0.18)	5.06*** (0.18)
Rate of Change	-0.42*** (0.07)	-0.35*** (0.08)	-0.31*** (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		0.32* (0.15)	0.13 (0.13)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	3.15	3.15	3.10
Level-2			
Initial status	8.35	8.33	7.82
Rate of change	0.21	0.22	0.19
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	6213.70	6172.07	5989.17
<i>AIC</i>	6225.70	6186.07	6005.17
<i>BIC</i>	6228.72	6189.60	6009.20
Total Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	4.28*** (0.15)	4.21*** (0.15)	4.17*** (0.15)
Rate of Change	-0.32*** (0.06)	-0.25*** (0.07)	-0.21** (0.06)

Table 7, cont'd. Direct effects of time-varying emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems

Outcomes	Model		
	Unconditional Growth	Conditional Growth	
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		Unadjusted 0.33** (0.11)	Adjusted 0.13 (0.11)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	2.21	2.21	2.19
Level-2			
Initial status	5.77	5.74	5.24
Rate of change	0.20	0.21	0.15
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	5745.18	5703.82	5520.70
<i>AIC</i>	5757.18	5717.82	5536.70
<i>BIC</i>	5760.20	5721.35	5540.73

Note. Conditional growth model is adjusted for mothers' depressive symptoms;

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Figures

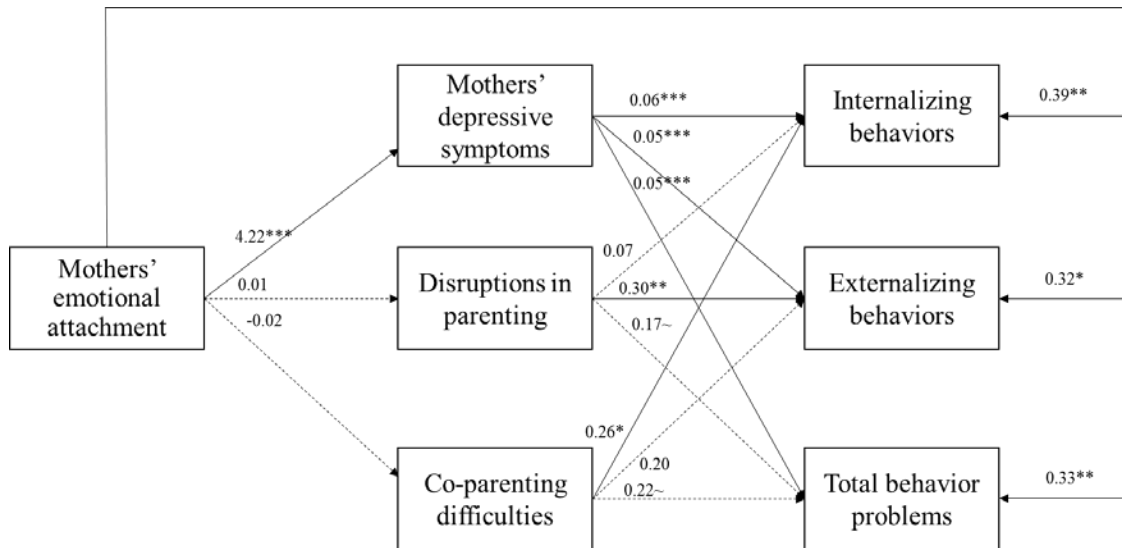


Figure 1. Conceptual model for direct effects of mothers' emotional attachment, mothers' depressive symptoms, disruptions in parenting practices, co-parenting difficulties, and children's behavior problems.

Note. Solid lines indicate significant effects, dashed lines indicate non-significant effects; $p < .001$ ***. $p < .01$ **. $p < .05$ *. $p < .10$ ~

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Appendix A.1. List of items included in *Emotional Attachment to the Ex-Spouse* measure.

1. I find myself spending a lot of time thinking about my ex-spouse
2. I find myself wondering what my ex-spouse is doing
3. I feel I will never get over the divorce
4. I feel as if this is all a horrible mistake
5. I feel as if I've been dumped
6. I still find myself sexually attracted to my ex-spouse

Appendix A.2. List of items included in *Mothers' Depressive Symptoms* measure.

1. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor
2. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends
3. I felt I was just as good as other people
4. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing
5. I felt depressed
6. I felt that everything I did was an effort
7. I felt hopeful about the future
8. I thought my life had been a failure
9. I felt fearful
10. My sleep was restless
11. I was happy
12. I talked less than usual
13. I felt lonely
14. People were unfriendly
15. I enjoyed life
16. I had crying spells
17. I felt sad
18. I felt that people disliked me
19. I could not get "going"

Appendix A.3. List of items included in *Disruptions in Mothers' Parenting Practices* measure.

Positive Parenting:

1. (Mother) skillfully prompted the youngster during the task as necessary
2. (Mother) encouraged the youngster's good ideas
3. (Mother) was positively responsive to the youngster's questions/requests for assistance
4. (Mother) used an appropriate level of reinforcement given the difficulty of task
5. (Mother) appropriately paced the task (relative to the youngster's needs)

Harsh Parenting:

1. (Mother) used negative or hostile corrections
2. (Mother) appeared overly strict, authoritarian, oppressive
3. (Mother) used nagging or nattering to get compliance
4. (Mother) expressed anger/hostility
5. (Mother) threatened unlikely disciplines (e.g., consequences that are hard to enforce)
6. (Mother) seemed irritable or angry
7. (Mother) used aversive techniques to get his/her way
8. (Mother) seemed to provoke the other person into arguments
9. (Mother) was consistent, even-handed, firm when necessary

Appendix A.4. List of items included in *Co-parenting Difficulties* measure.

Co-parenting Communication:

1. When there was a problem with the child(ren) you and he worked together to find the best way to handle it
2. You and he made sure you let each other know what was going on with the children
3. You and he talked about what you should do as parents
4. Your ex-spouse had good judgement about how to solve problems with the child(ren)
5. You and he tried to coordinate with one another to present a united front to the child(ren)

Conflict over Childrearing Practices:

1. You and he argued about moral values related to raising the child(ren)
2. You and he argued about discipline practices
3. You and he argued about the activities done with the child(ren), like watching TV, selecting movies, etc.
4. You and he argued about child support
5. You and he argued about money matters other than child support
6. You and he argued about scheduling pick-up and drop-off times and locations for the child(ren)
7. You and he argued about someone he was romantically involved with who spent time with the child(ren)

Appendix A.4, cont'd. List of items included in *Co-parenting Difficulties* measure.

8. You and he argued about someone you were romantically involved with who
spent time with who spent time with the child(ren)

Appendix A.5. List of items included in *Children's Behavior Problems* measure.

1. (Child) has sudden changes in mood or feeling (E)
2. (Child) feels or complains that no one loves him/her (I)
3. (Child) is rather high strung and nervous (E)
4. (Child) is too fearful or anxious (I)
5. (Child) has difficulty concentrating, cannot pay attention for long (E)
6. (Child) is easily confused, seems to be in a fog (I)
7. (Child) feels worthless or inferior (I)
8. (Child) has difficulty getting (his/her) mind off certain thoughts (I)
9. (Child) is stubborn, sullen, or irritable (E)
10. (Child) is unhappy, sad or depressed (I)
11. (Child) is withdrawn, does not get involved with others (I)
12. (Child) clings to adults (Not included in either subscale)
13. (Child) cries too much (E)
14. (Child) is too dependent on others (I)
15. (Child) feels others are out to get (him/her) (I)
16. (Child) is secretive, keeps things to (himself/herself) (I)
17. (Child) worries too much (I)
18. (Child) cheats or tells lies (E)
19. (Child) argues too much (E)
20. (Child) is disobedient at home (E)
21. (Child) does not seem to feel sorry after (Child) misbehaves (E)

Appendix A.5, cont'd. List of items included in *Children's Behavior Problems* measure.

- 22. (Child) is impulsive, or acts without thinking (E)
- 23. (Child) is not liked by other children (I)
- 24. (Child) is restless or overly active, cannot sit still (E)
- 25. (Child) has a very strong temper and loses it easily (E)
- 26. (Child) breaks things on purpose or deliberately destroys (his/her) own or another's things (E)
- 27. (Child) demands a lot of attention (E)
- 28. (Child) hangs around with kids who get into trouble (Not included in either subscale)
- 29. (Child) bullies or is cruel or mean to others (E)
- 30. (Child) has trouble getting along with other children (E)

Note. (E)= Externalizing, (I)=Internalizing.

Appendix B

Appendix B contains Tables 3-7 adjusted: All models have been adjusted for mothers' education, mothers' income from the previous year, length of marital separation, number of children, and children's age, gender, and age*gender

Table 8. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse, mothers' depressive symptoms, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Mothers' Depressive Symptoms			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	15.94*** (1.75)		
Rate of Change	-0.66* (0.30)		
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse	4.30*** (0.43)		
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	6.23		
Level-2			
Initial status	7.00		
Rate of change	2.78		
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
Deviance	9192.61		
AIC	9220.61		
BIC	9227.66		
Internalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		3.14*** (0.52)	3.15*** (0.52)
Rate of Change		-0.08 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		-	0.14 (0.12)
Mothers' depressive symptoms		0.07*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		1.66	1.66
Level-2			
Initial status		2.23	2.23
Rate of change		0.58	0.58
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
Deviance		5792.50	5761.36
AIC		5820.50	5791.36
BIC		5827.55	5798.92
Externalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		5.46*** (0.64)	5.47*** (0.64)
Rate of Change		-0.34*** (0.07)	-0.31*** (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		-	0.15(0.13)
Mothers' depressive symptoms		0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
<i>Variance components</i>			

Table 8, cont'd. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse, mothers' depressive symptoms, and children's behavior problems

Outcomes	Direct effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Level-1 within-person		1.76	1.76
Level-2			
Initial status		2.75	2.75
Rate of change		0.42	0.43
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		6004.35	5975.12
<i>AIC</i>		6032.35	6005.12
<i>BIC</i>		6039.40	6012.68
Total Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		4.43*** (0.52)	4.43*** (0.52)
Rate of Change		-0.23*** (0.06)	-0.21*** (0.07)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		-	0.14 (0.11)
Mothers' depressive symptoms		0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		1.48	1.48
Level-2			
Initial status		2.25	2.25
Rate of change		0.37	0.38
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		5535.85	5508.80
<i>AIC</i>		5563.85	5538.80
<i>BIC</i>		5570.90	5546.36

Note. All models are adjusted for Mothers' education, mothers' income from the previous year, length of marital separation, number of children, children's age, gender, age*gender ; * $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 9. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' attachment to the ex-spouse, disruptions in mothers' parenting, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Disruptions in Mothers' Parenting Practices			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	1.63*** (0.12)		
Rate of Change	0.03 (0.03)		
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse	0.04 (0.04)		
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	0.61		
Level-2			
Initial status	0.30		
Rate of change	0.07		
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	1793.99		
<i>AIC</i>	1821.99		
<i>BIC</i>	1829.04		
Internalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		3.65*** (0.57)	3.64*** (0.56)
Rate of Change		-0.19* (0.08)	-0.13 90.09)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		-	0.33* (0.14)
Disruptions in mothers' parenting practices		0.05 (0.11)	0.06 (0.11)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		1.56	1.55
Level-2			
Initial status		2.35	2.33
Rate of change		0.75	0.77
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3943.10	3903.78
<i>AIC</i>		3971.10	3933.78
<i>BIC</i>		3978.15	3941.34
Externalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		5.95*** (0.67)	5.93*** (0.73)
Rate of Change		-0.37*** (0.08)	-0.30*** (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		-	0.32~ (0.17)

Table 9, cont'd. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' attachment to the ex-spouse, disruptions in mothers' parenting, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Disruptions in mothers' parenting practices		0.27* (0.11)	0.25* (0.11)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		1.63	1.63
Level-2			
Initial status		2.85	2.86
Rate of change		0.43	0.43
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		4040.53	4008.71
<i>AIC</i>		4068.53	4038.71
<i>BIC</i>		4075.58	4046.27
Total Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		4.92*** (0.56)	4.90*** (0.56)
Rate of Change		-0.30*** (0.07)	-0.24*** (0.07)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		-	0.31* (0.12)
Disruptions in mothers' parenting practices		0.14 (0.09)	0.15 (0.09)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		1.35	1.34
Level-2			
Initial status		2.37	2.40
Rate of change		0.49	0.50
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3738.77	3707.14
<i>AIC</i>		3766.77	3737.14
<i>BIC</i>		3773.82	3744.70

Note. All models are adjusted for mothers' education, mothers' income from the previous year, length of marital separation, number of children, children's age, gender, age*gender ; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 10. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' attachment to the ex-spouse, co-parenting difficulties, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct Effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Co-parenting Difficulties			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	1.58*** (0.14)		
Rate of Change	-0.01 (0.02)		
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse	-0.01 (0.04)		
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	0.45		
Level-2			
Initial status	0.59		
Rate of change	0.16		
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	1477.12		
<i>AIC</i>	1505.12		
<i>BIC</i>	1512.17		
Internalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		3.46*** (0.57)	3.44*** (0.57)
Rate of Change		-0.23** (0.08)	-0.18* (0.09)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		-	0.28~ (0.14)
Co-parenting difficulties		0.26* (0.13)	0.29* (0.13)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		1.48	1.48
Level-2			
Initial status		2.37	2.35
Rate of change		0.80	0.80
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3522.70	3491.17
<i>AIC</i>		3550.70	3521.17
<i>BIC</i>		3557.75	3528.73
Externalizing Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		5.91*** (0.69)	5.87*** (0.69)
Rate of Change		-0.47*** (0.08)	-0.42*** (0.09)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		-	0.24 (0.16)
Co-parenting difficulties		0.18 (0.14)	0.16 (0.14)
<i>Variance components</i>			

Table 10, cont'd. Direct and indirect effects of mothers' attachment to the ex-spouse, co-parenting difficulties, and children's behavior problems.

Outcomes	Direct Effects		Indirect Effects
	Model A	Model B	Model C
Level-1 within-person		1.59	1.60
Level-2			
Initial status		2.90	2.90
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3648.68	3623.69
<i>AIC</i>		3676.68	3653.69
<i>BIC</i>		3683.73	3661.25
Total Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status		4.81*** (0.57)	4.78*** (0.57)
Rate of Change		-0.36*** (0.07)	-0.32*** (0.07)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		-	0.23~ (0.13)
Co-parenting difficulties		0.20~ (0.12)	0.22~ (0.12)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person		1.28	1.29
Level-2			
Initial status		2.37	2.37
Rate of change		0.57	0.57
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>		3347.53	3324.99
<i>AIC</i>		3375.53	3354.99
<i>BIC</i>		3382.58	3362.55

Note. All models are adjusted for mothers' education, mothers' income from the previous year, length of marital separation, number of children, children's age, gender, age*gender ; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 11. Tests of formal mediation
Outcomes

	Total Effect	Mediation	% Explained by Mediation	r_{ab}
Mothers' depressive symptoms				
Internalizing behaviors	0.37* (0.17)	0.28** (0.11)	0.78 (0.40)	0.02 (0.14)
Externalizing behaviors	0.51** (0.17)	0.10 (0.11)	0.20 (0.21)	-0.15 (0.14)
Total behavior problems	0.44** (0.14)	0.19 (0.10)	0.42* (0.10)	-0.09 (0.13)
Disruptions in mothers' parenting practices				
Internalizing behaviors	0.42* (0.17)	0.01 (0.06)	0.01 (0.13)	0.06 (0.86)
Externalizing behaviors	0.52** (0.16)	-0.00 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.52)
Total behavior problems	0.47*** (0.13)	0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.08)	0.04 (0.42)
Co-parenting difficulties				
Internalizing behaviors	0.39* (0.17)	0.04 (0.08)	0.09 (0.20)	0.07 (0.16)
Externalizing behaviors	0.50** (0.17)	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.16 (0.19)	-0.16 (0.18)
Total behavior problems	0.45** (0.13)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.16)	-0.08 (0.17)

Note. All models are adjusted for mothers' education, mothers' income from the previous year, length of marital separation, number of children, children's age, gender, age*gender ; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 12. Direct effects of time-varying emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems

Outcomes	Model		
	Unconditional Growth	Conditional Growth	
Internalizing Behaviors		Unadjusted	Adjusted
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	3.28*** (0.15)	3.21*** (0.15)	3.15*** (0.52)
Rate of Change	-0.18* (0.07)	-0.11 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		0.39** (0.12)	0.14 (0.12)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	2.75	2.73	1.66
Level-2			
Initial status	5.76	5.64	2.23
Rate of change	0.47	0.48	0.58
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	6006.76	5955.28	5761.36
<i>AIC</i>	6018.76	5969.28	5791.36
<i>BIC</i>	6021.78	5972.81	5798.92
Externalizing Behaviors			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	5.18*** (0.18)	5.11*** (0.18)	5.47*** (0.64)
Rate of Change	-0.42*** (0.07)	-0.35*** (0.08)	-0.31*** (0.08)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		0.32* (0.15)	0.16 (0.13)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	3.15	3.15	1.76
Level-2			
Initial status	8.35	8.33	2.75
Rate of change	0.21	0.22	0.43
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	6213.70	6172.07	5975.12
<i>AIC</i>	6225.70	6186.07	6005.12
<i>BIC</i>	6228.72	6189.60	6012.68
Total Behavior Problems			
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Initial Status	4.28*** (0.15)	4.21*** (0.15)	4.43*** (0.52)
Rate of Change	-0.32*** (0.06)	-0.25*** (0.07)	-0.21*** (0.06)
Mothers' emotional attachment to the ex-spouse		0.33** (0.11)	0.14 (0.11)
<i>Variance components</i>			
Level-1 within-person	2.21	2.21	1.48

Table 12, cont'd. Direct effects of time-varying emotional attachment to the ex-spouse on children's internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems

Outcomes	Model		
	Unconditional Growth	Conditional Growth	
Level-2			
Initial status	5.77	5.74	2.25
Rate of change	0.20	0.21	0.38
<i>Goodness of Fit Statistics</i>			
<i>Deviance</i>	5745.18	5703.82	5508.80
<i>AIC</i>	5757.18	5717.82	5538.80
<i>BIC</i>	5760.20	5721.35	5546.36

Note. Conditional growth model is adjusted for mothers' depressive symptoms, mothers' education, mothers' income from the previous year, length of marital separation, number of children, children's age, gender, age*gender ; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

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